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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food Safety
and Inspection
Service

Safe Handling Tips for Meat and Poultry

Refrigerators and freezers are two indispensable servants in the home. But when the power fails or when the refrigerator or freezer breaks down, we panic. However, all does not have to be lost, if some of the following hints are followed.

WHAT TO DO IF THE POWER FAILS OR IF THE REFRIGERATOR OR FREEZER QUILTS:

For Refrigerated Foods:

- * Keep your refrigerator door closed. Opening the door lets precious cold air out. Never open a refrigerator or freezer "just to check on how the foods are doing."
- * If it looks like it will be out for more than a few hours, add regular ice to the refrigerator. The more ice you use, the longer the food will keep cold. Put in some pans to catch melting ice.
- * If the refrigerator will be out for an extended period of time, try transferring refrigerated foods to the freezer section of your refrigerator or to a separate freezer. The products already frozen will keep the refrigerated foods cold longer even with no additional power. Do this only as a last resort.

For Freezer Stored Foods:

- * Keep the freezer closed. Open it only to add dry ice or refrigerated foods. If you must open the door to take food out or put some in, do it once. A fully loaded freezer will keep foods frozen for 2 days. A half-full freezer will only keep food cold for a day. 25 pounds of dry ice added to a 10 cubic foot fully loaded freezer will keep foods frozen up to 3 full days. Handle dry ice carefully with tongs or with protective gloves. Dry ice burns bare hands. Provide adequate ventilation since vapors can be harmful. Put heavy cardboard directly on the packages of frozen food and then put the dry ice on top of the cardboard. Find out in advance where to purchase dry ice and how much you may need.
- * When electric power is restored, be sure to check your foods and determine the extent of thawing. Get rid of any food that is off-color or that has an off-odor. Never taste suspect meat or poultry or other foods. Meats that still have ice crystals present or have maintained a 40°F or lower temperature (for less than 2 days) may safely be refrozen. Some quality may be lost, but the product should still be wholesome and safe to eat. Use refrozen food quickly.

MAXIMUM STORAGE TIMES TO MAINTAIN QUALITY FOR MEAT AND POULTRY

Exceeding the times shown for refrigerator storage could mean spoiled food. Exceeding the freezer storage times shown could result in quality loss, but the food still would be safe to eat.

<u>Product</u>	<u>Refrigerator</u> (DAYS at 40°F)	<u>Freezer</u> (MONTHS at 0°F)
FRESH MEATS		
Roasts (beef)	3 to 5	6 to 12
Roasts (lamb)	3 to 5	6 to 9
Roasts (pork, veal)	3 to 5	4 to 8
Steaks (beef)	3 to 5	6 to 12
Chops (lamb)	3 to 5	6 to 9
Chops (pork)	3 to 5	3 to 4
Hamburger, ground and stew meats	1 to 2	3 to 4
Variety meats (tongue, brain, kidneys, liver and heart)	1 to 2	3 to 4
Sausage (pork)	1 to 2	1 to 2
COOKED MEATS		
Cooked meat and meat dishes	3 to 4	2 to 3
Gravy and meat broth	1 to 2	2 to 3
PROCESSED MEATS (Frozen cured meat loses quality rapidly and should be used as soon as possible.)		
Bacon	7	1
Frankfurters	7	1 to 2
Ham (whole)	7	1 to 2
Ham (half)	3 to 5	1 to 2
Ham (slices)	3	1 to 2
Luncheon meats	3 to 5*	1 to 2
Sausage (smoked)	7	1 to 2
Sausage (dry, semi-dry)	14 to 21	1 to 2
FRESH POULTRY		
Chicken and turkey (whole)	1 to 2	12
Chicken pieces	1 to 2	9
Turkey pieces	1 to 2	6
Duck and goose (whole)	1 to 2	6
Giblets	1 to 2	3 to 4
COOKED POULTRY		
Covered with broth, gravy	1 to 2	6
Pieces not in broth or gravy	3 to 4	1
Cooked poultry dishes	3 to 4	4 to 6
Fried chicken	3 to 4	4
GAME		
Venison	3 to 5	6 to 12
Rabbit	1 to 2	12
Duck and goose (whole, wild)	1 to 2	6

*Once vacuum-sealed package is opened. Unopened vacuum-sealed packages can be stored in the refrigerator for 2 weeks.